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SUBJECT: NORTHERN BAHR EL GHAZAL - SOURCES OF FRAGILITY

REF: a) KHARTOUM 0620, b) KHARTOUM 0452, c) KHARTOUM
2140, d) KHARTOUM 0491

Summary and Comment

¶1. A team of USAID staff and key USAID partners visited Wau town in Western Bahr el Ghazal State (Ref a) and Aweil town in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State from February 22 to 26. The trip was part of a series of visits to areas of USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/DCHA) programming to investigate causes of fragility and how USAID/DCHA programs might reduce the potential for conflict. This is the second of two cables on the visit and covers meetings and issues raised in Aweil.

¶2. Interlocutors in Aweil primarily voiced concern over the large number of Rezeigat nomads entering the state with cattle herds. Residents expressed fear that the nomads are motivated for a potential "land grab" that could destabilize the area. Returnees face challenges related to essential services and resolution of conflicts with host populations.

¶3. Support to Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) officials at the state, county, and village levels is imperative. Development partners should urge the GoSS in Juba to disburse funds quickly to state and county governments, so that local authorities can undertake projects that directly and visibly improve people's lives. USAID should continue a community-based approach to the provision of essential services, focusing on the most vulnerable war-affected populations, regardless of their status (displaced, returnee, or resident). USAID should also continue to support local peace and reconciliation efforts, including those that address nomad-farmer relations, in Bahr el Ghazal and elsewhere in Southern Sudan. End summary and comment.

Background

¶4. From February 22 to 26, USAID representatives and key partners visited Aweil town, the capital of Northern Bahr El Ghazal State, to investigate how USAID programs might

reduce the potential for conflict and promote a stabilizing environment to support the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The USAID team included USAID/Khartoum's internally displaced persons (IDP) returnee specialist, an Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) southern sector program officer, the Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) southern sector team leader, and an education specialist. Three staff from USAID/OTI partner Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), and one representative from USAID partner Pact, Inc., also participated in the visits. USAID/DCHA is supporting a number of NGOs and U.N. agencies in Northern Bahr el Ghazal.

Aweil Town Meetings

15. The USAID team held numerous meetings with NGO implementing partners from Aweil town, Aweil West (Nyamlel), and Aweil East (Malual Kon and Warawar); U.N. partners; and GoSS officials to discuss the potential for conflict and factors affecting stability in Northern Bahr El Ghazal. On February 25, the USAID team held a general meeting in Aweil town for 40 participants at the compound of the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Participants in the general meeting included GoSS officials from the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRC); representatives from USAID partner organizations, such as Concern Worldwide, Pact, International Rescue Committee, Tearfund, and World Vision; and representatives from non-USAID funded NGOs such as Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF), Cordaid, the Diocese of Rumbek, and U.N. agencies.

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16. As in Wau town, Arabic remains the dominant language of commerce in Aweil town. Like Wau, Aweil town still has the feel of a "northern" town, and Aweil also appears to lean more toward Khartoum than to Juba for transportation, commerce, and services.

Sources of Fragility

17. Migration of armed nomads: Interlocutors reported that armed Rezeigat nomads and their cattle entered Aweil West and Aweil North Counties allegedly without traditional negotiations. The SRRC State Secretary and others regard this as an organized effort politicized and supported financially from Khartoum to occupy land in Northern Bahr el Ghazal. The SRRC State Secretary emphatically stated that he believed this was an effort not only to grab land, but also to "Islamicize" southerners. The persistent fear of nomads voiced in Bahr el Ghazal (Reftel B), Abyei County (Reftel C), Unity State (Reftel D), and other areas that border nomad migratory routes is understandable. The GoSS has little capacity to address the issue, and shrinking resources in the north and the growing size of herds is putting pressure on land in the south.

18. Limited resources: The recent arrival of IDPs from South Darfur and returnees from the north could overwhelm the already extremely limited essential services. Aweil town is suffering from a long-lasting water and sanitation problem that will be exacerbated during the rainy season and compounded by the growing urban population. The severe drought resulting in less locally available food could trigger conflict over limited food supply.

19. IDP returns: Returnees are arriving in large numbers to the state with no support provided en route. The

International Organization for Migration has agreed with local authorities to put a way station in Warawar, a key entry point for those coming from the north, but the monitoring and tracking system in the state is still not in place. To date, only 2,100 returnees have been registered in town, although the number is believed to be much higher. An accurate number will be important to prepare for reintegration packages and to ensure that communities receiving the IDPs are also assisted. To date, there has been no humanitarian crisis linked to the IDPs that have already returned.

¶10. Grievance, revenge, and ethnic issues: Such issues continue to simmer and burn. Peace and reconciliation efforts should be the number one priority. (Note: Recently in Akuem, despite a shortage of qualified medical workers, Dinka chased out qualified Equatorians applying for jobs with MSF, still furious over the killing of Dinka in Equatoria earlier this year. End note.)

¶11. Burning of markets: Interlocutors reported that 12 "non-Arab" markets in Northern Bahr el Ghazal have been burned during the past year. This arson is believed widely to be perpetrated by people with political motives encouraged by "Khartoum."

¶12. Weak GoSS and traditional court capacity: The capacity of the GoSS in Aweil town is limited, and it is unable to meet or manage the expectations of the people. Traditional conflict resolution systems (traditional courts) have been disempowered during the war and need some limited support to become effective again.

¶13. Slow progress in implementing the CPA: This is a major concern throughout Southern Sudan, and it was obvious that the average citizen understands very little about the CPA.

¶14. Small arms proliferation: The proliferation of small arms continues despite a civilian disarmament campaign.

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¶15. Alcohol-related problems: Alcohol abuse and resulting conflict is increasing.

Recommendations

¶16. Traditional leaders and courts need assistance in dealing with inter-tribal matters, such as relations with the Rezeigat, and other issues that involve land use, water, and migration routes for cattle.

¶17. Provision of water and sanitation services should be a high priority for the GoSS and donors, in addition to other basic services. An equitable, community-based approach should drive the provision of assistance, prioritizing the most vulnerable populations regardless of their status. To the extent possible, essential services should be established in rural areas to prevent returnees from overwhelming Aweil town.

¶18. Standing up an accountable GoSS state government system is critical. Southern Sudanese need to have confidence in the ability of their government to meet the needs of the people. GoSS ministries should replace NGOs as service providers as soon as possible. The GoSS must incorporate traditional authority into new governing structures.

¶19. The general public does not understand how the GoSS system works. Dissemination of the CPA as well as an explanation of the GoSS administrative system is

necessary.

¶20. The registration of Sudan People's Liberation Army soldiers, in order to effect payment, should be an urgent priority for supporting peace and stability. The first phase of the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program is focusing on registration of child soldiers, women associated with armed groups, and the disabled. Some individual disarmament is occurring in some states with weapons being cantoned for later demobilization.

¶21. Grievances and revenge issues between groups need to be confronted and addressed through reconciliation, rule of law, and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

WHITAKER